

turning from sin and seeking truly to do His Will? In our present passage we find no suggestion of promising to obey God's law more fully nor of asking Him to point out the wrong in the people's lives which keeps Him from blessing them. The whole stress is on one idea: these are God's people; God has blessed His people in the past; Oh that He would pour out similar material blessings upon them again.

Verse 5 begins with a statement of God's general attitude of mercy toward those who are righteous, but the following verses do not express either desire for personal righteousness or actual penitence for sin. The last part of verse 5 is rather obscure in the Authorized Version. Probably the Revised Version comes nearer to the meaning: "Behold, thou wast wroth, and we sinned: in them have we been of long time and shall we be saved?" The present misery has gone on for a long time. God's wrath has shown its effect during many years. Is there hope of improvement?

Verses 6 and 7 look superficially like a confession of sin and penitence. However they neither contain nor are followed by any promise of improvement in righteousness or plea for divine help to this end. It is recognized that the nation is characterized by sin and iniquity, but the tendency seems to be to attribute this to God, and to emphasize the need of material benefit rather than to stage a desire for spiritual or moral betterment. It is rather blandly said that "there is none that calleth upon thy name. . . for thou hast hid thy face from us." Religious indifference seems to be a subject, not for strong regret, but for attribution to the agency of God Himself.

The last phrase of verse 7 is perhaps more accurately translated in the American Revised Version than in the Authorized Version: "Thou. . . hast consumed us by means of our iniquities." Even the iniquities of the people are simply a means that God is using to injure them. The plea consists of a request that He should treat them differently.

#### THE POTTER

Verse 8 again presents the same idea. Why should God blame His people? He is the potter, and they are merely the clay. Why doesn't He treat them better? After all, they are His people. This is very different from the way that Paul uses the same figure in Romans 9, or Jeremiah in Jeremiah 18. Neither of them provides any warrant for the suggestion that God's sovereignty gives us an excuse for blaming on Him the results of our own sin and neglect.

Verse 9 refers to iniquity again, not as something present that needs change, but as something past which God is remembering too long. "Be not wroth very sore, O LORD, neither remember iniquity forever: behold, see, we beseech thee, we are all thy people." They do not say, "We repent of our iniquities. It's all our fault. We're very sorry. We pray for help, that we may have a changed heart and attitude." No. They merely say, "Behold, we are all thy people."

The next two verses stress the material suffering and desolation. Written in the time of Isaiah, they represent a transference in imagination to the time when those events so vividly predicted in the earlier portion of his prophecy should already have been fulfilled. The result is imagined as already present (as also in 63:18). People know that Isaiah is God's spokesman. They realize that his predictions are bound to come to pass. They see their fulfillment as already present. Facing the situation as a reality, they pray for help. But their prayer falls far short of the attitude that God requires. The plea, which reaches a climax in verse 12, is very impassioned. It bases itself on a fact--God's relationship to the people whom He has set aside to be His own. All of it, if certain other elements were added, would be true and effective. As it is, however, it deserves not acquiescence but condemnation. It inevitably leads to the strong rebuke which follows. Even before the exile has begun Isaiah presents this picture of the attitude which the nation as a whole will take and of the rebuke which God will give as His answer, in order that